

September 21, 2011

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To The Honorable Senator Pavlov and Members of the Senate Education Committee:

Thank you for providing this opportunity for public input to this set of bills you are considering. As a 13-year member of the Bloomfield Hills Board of Education, I feel compelled to beg your attention to learn what may be many unintended consequences of these bills. We all believe that it is critically important for the future of all our children, our fair state and our nation that we provide our children with the best possible education that will prepare them for a happy and successful life. If we are using test scores to define success, then I would assert to you that none of the nations we hold as successful, Finland, Singapore and other high scoring nations on the international PISA exam, are using charter schools, voucher programs, conversion schools, rather they put a high-value on recruiting the best talent and carefully training them in high quality programs to put the best teachers in front of their students. I can tell you that, today, teachers in every district in Michigan are demoralized. Our students will suffer as a result.

#### Senate Bill 618 – Charter Expansion

I was walking the hallways here in Lansing when the first charter school legislation was being drafted. At that time, there was a lot of idealist thought about high quality programs that would demonstrate a particular strength in a community, such as the wonderful program offered at The Henry Ford, caution was expressed however, that we didn't want "cookie-cutter" schools that would be the Mc Donald's of education. What has transpired over the years has been a carefully crafted attack on the whole institution of public education. I will not deny that there are schools with serious problems that are failing to provide a good education to their children, but to throw the baby out with the bathwater when most communities are doing well is irresponsible.

There is an extremely well-funded campaign by high profile individuals such as Betsy DeVos, who heads an The American Federation for Children, who on their website state that they "want to expand funding for charter schools while defunding public schools".

Data does not exist to support the idea that more charter schools will increase student achievement. Student achievement in Charter schools, in fact, is lower than demographically similar schools. Evidence currently shows that charter schools are not more likely than traditional schools to innovate.

To me one of the best strengths of this nation is that it is through our public schools that people from every culture, religion and nationality come together and learn to collaborate and appreciate each other's differences that makes the fabric of our democracy stronger. There is strong evidence that there is both "white flight" and "minority flight" in charter schools and that children in those programs will experience less diversity.

There is no quantitative data that exists to prove that parental choice improves student learning. As locally elected boards of education, we are entrusted to use public money carefully and we will be held to high standards of accountability and transparency.

Charter operators must be subject to the same standards.

## Senate Bill 620 – Conversion Schools

Bloomfield Hills Schools currently serves over 5000 students. In recent years we have experienced declining enrollment and reduced funding. I know people in Lansing have no sympathy for those wealthy people in Bloomfield Hills, but we have issues, too. We are a diverse community where more than 50 languages are spoken at home. We currently have over 600 students who are eligible for free lunch programs. We have families whose electricity has been turned off because Mom & Dad can't get a job to pay the bills. Three years ago we closed 2 elementary schools to be more efficient. Today, my entire 7-member board is facing recall for our efforts to combine our two high schools to preserve academic and co-curricular programs for our students. We have a triple A bond rating, we receive awards annually for excellence in financial reporting, our students have high test scores, and yet our community is divided. In spite of all that, our students continue to perform well and our families love their schools. It is clear to me that it would be very likely that 51% of parents who could be upset over a fired coach or principal or some other non-academic issue could decide to become a conversion school. To me this triggers a thousand questions I don't think you have begun to answer. What if all the teachers don't agree? Do the parents get to hire their own teachers? How about the other 49%? Will districts be forced to absorb children elsewhere? To they have to go to another building that could be much farther away? The loss of revenue of those who seceded would cause a cascade of losses to the rest of the district. If the school was recently built or updated by a bond issue, clearly the whole community has invested in the school, who owns it now? This idea is not well conceived. This bill could be very harmful and disruptive for all students in a community.

## Senate Bill 624 - Mandatory Statewide Schools of Choice

Currently over 85% of school districts in Michigan participate in schools of choice. In my district SOC would create extreme havoc. Taxpayers in our district already send 2 out of every three dollars they pay in property taxes to support students in the rest of the state. They would continue paying high taxes for reduced educational quality as choice students would bring lower per-pupil foundation dollars. Property values would fall while community support would erode as local control disappears. Our school district is a hold-harmless district. Our residents have voted to tax themselves \$4000 per pupil since Proposal was passed. It seems unlikely we would be successful in asking them to continue that support of non-resident students. Schools of choice is working well in many communities. We live in a democratic society, where we have many freedoms. Community pride and investment to make educational improvements for the children when the programs are clearly successful should be a matter of local control.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my concerns about these bills.

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